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The Connected Community: Palo Alto, Local Business Combine Forces on the Net

Affluent, educated, and wired, Palo Alto, on the northern frontier of California's Silicon Valley, is not a typical community. In its demographic and commercial structure, however, Palo Alto is a microcosm of the Internet.

First Up

For starters, Palo Alto was the first city in the U.S. to have its own Web page, and currently more than half the population has access to the Internet at work, home, or school, said Dianah L. Neff, director of information resources for the city. The Web server was created for the city by Digital Equipment Corp., which also provided a fiber network for the entire community. The

occasion for creating the home page and laying the fiber was Palo Alto's centennial in 1994. By linking information about the 1994 World Cup games, held in Palo Alto (among other places), Digital generated world interest in the local community. The city's Web site now runs to some 750 Web pages (<http://www.city.palo-alto.ca.us/>).

Susan Frank, executive director of the chamber of commerce, explains Digital's generosity in part as good citizenship (Digital is a major local employer). But she says it was also good internal marketing for the Internet Business Group at Digital, which wanted to expand the company's own

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Internet Services Migrate to the Web

ClariNet Communications Corp. announced in February that it would begin publishing its Usenet newsgroups, based on newsfeeds from the major wire services, on the World Wide Web. The new service, e.News, will include 1,000 or more news stories a day and will be available to people whose access providers pay for the service. e.News won't supplant the existing Usenet News service.

ClariNet is not the only service to add a Web dimension to current services. A few years ago Internet users had to master a set of tools to use the Internet effectively: mail, lists, and News to communicate with people; FTP to download files; Telnet to use remote computer resources; plus search utilities such as Archie, Netfind, Hytelnet, and Veronica.

Today, key business resources are becoming available on the Web, while Web browsers

support more and more protocols. In a year or so, a good Web browser and a good mailer may be all you need to do anything on the Internet.

Net-happenings

Net-happenings, for example, was one of the Internet's most popular mailing lists about a year ago. Moderated and maintained by Gleason Sackman, in North Dakota, the list contained postings about new Internet resources. In the fall of 1994, the list migrated to Usenet News (<comp.internet.net-happenings>), to simplify its distribution and make it more broadly available.

With the Net-happenings list, each mail message must be mailed to thousands of mailboxes. With the newsgroup, articles need only be circulated among the world's News servers, from

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WebObserver:

Napa on the Net

Two new and quite different sites bring the warmth and great wines of California's Napa Valley to the large part of the Internet community not lucky enough to live there. *Virtual Vineyards* is an online wine-retailing establishment that provides both information about wines and the opportunity to buy them. *Napa Valley Virtual Visit* (NVVV) is a marketing site for many of the tourist-related businesses of the Napa Valley—restaurants, golf courses, hotels, as well as many wineries.

The Spirit of Napa

Virtual Vineyards (<http://www.virtualvin.com/>) was founded by Peter Granoff, the 13th American admitted to the British Court of Master Sommeliers—the wine

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world's Who's Who. With years of experience teaching people about wine and creating wine lists for fancy restaurants, Granoff now uses the World Wide Web to bring an understanding of wine to millions who lack the opportunity to buy California wines or who may be intimidated if they do have the opportunity.

The site provides the information a purchaser needs to evaluate wines by their quality rather than by the attractiveness of their labels. There's a glossary, so

The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "NETCOM NetCruiser - World Wide Web: Talley Vineyards 1992 Chardonnay, Arroyo". The main content area displays the Talley Vineyards logo and the text "1992 Arroyo Grande Valley Chardonnay". Below this is a "Remember this wine" button. A summary text reads: "Summary: Beautifully integrated oak and bright, citrus/pineapple fruit in an absolutely seamless package. Medium to full body, medium-high intensity of flavor. \$17.00". To the right is a graphical rating system with scales for various wine characteristics. The scales range from "delicate" to "powerful", "bone dry" to "dessert", "light body" to "very full body", "soft, gentle" to "very crisp", "none" to "heavy tannins", "none" to "heavy oak", and "direct" to "very complex".

One of the many wines that can be ordered at the Virtual Vineyards. Notice the abundance of elements clearly presented in this tight space: the inline graphic (the wine's label); the summary, price, and sales pitch; the graphical yet nuanced rating system; and the button allowing a user to order this wine. Elsewhere at this site are a glossary and an explanation of the rating and ordering systems.

readers can tell when a wine is "buttery" and when it's "grassy." For novices there's a Q&A called "Ask the Cork Dork." And cooks get advice on pairing foods to specific wines.

The heart of the site is a set of featured wineries, each offering selected wines. All of the wineries have directory listings on Virtual Vineyard's Web server; none currently has a home page. Virtual Vineyards provides consistent and comparable data across wineries for every wine they sell.

For each winery there's information about the owners, the products, and the wines that can be ordered via the Virtual Vineyards. Each wine that can be ordered is ranked from one to seven in terms of half a dozen traits,

such as intensity of flavor and acidity. It's all quite subjective, based on Granoff's judgment and perception. Objective data are also available for each wine—alcohol, pH, and acidity levels, for example.

It's possible to view one vineyard after another by clicking the Next link, emulating somewhat the experience of visiting Napa vineyards by car. Or, sites can be visited randomly from a list of vineyards. Or, you can search for types of wines (Chardonnay, for example), across wineries.

Whenever you like a wine, you can click on a "Remember this wine" button. Your selections are collected at the ordering page, from which you can buy the wines that appealed to you.

Placing Orders

Virtual Vineyards allows online ordering in three ways: by online form (for people whose browsers support forms and who are comfortable submitting credit-card data online); by a toll-free number provided on the Web site; or by a combination Web form and phone/fax—using the form to send name, address, and order details, then providing credit-card data by phone or fax.

Virtual Vineyards supports the sales and fulfillment at its own site, and is promoting its own retailing services, not the wineries whose products it is selling.

Stronger Stuff

The Whisky Connoisseur, in Thistle Mill Biggar, Scotland, is a sort of whisky-of-the-month club. Once you pay to join this club, you are entitled to purchase fine whiskies from the club's periodically published catalog. Like the Virtual Vineyard, this company warns potential purchasers to heed their respective import laws. The club's Gopher site is <gopher://leapfrog.almac.co.uk/11/business/mall/whisky>. It provides membership information and a sample catalog. For more information, send e-mail to w.con@almac.co.uk.

A one-stop source of information about Scotch whisky, complete with (among other things) a glossary, a clickable map, a directory of distilleries, and tasting notes, is the Malt Whisky Tour (<http://www.dcs.ed.ac.uk/staff/jhb/whisky/>). The tour is a non-commercial site—evidently a labor of love on the part of its creator—that provides abundant context for making selections from the Whisky Connoisseur club.

Additional wine resources...

The Internet offers additional wine resources via a set of links at Virtual Visit's site and at the following spirited but noncommercial Web site: <http://augustus.csscr.washington.edu/personal/bigstar-mosaic/winelink.html>. Here you'll find links to sites devoted to the wines of (among other places) Slovenia, Hungary, and South Africa.

Virtual Vineyards has chosen Netsite (Netscape Communications Corp.) as its server because of its security features, and it plans eventually to sell wines using technologies developed by CyberCash (see Section 314 of your *Guide*). All sales information is maintained off the Net, the company says.

The Virtual Vineyards Web design facilitates wine shopping by providing explicit navigational assistance. On every page you can return to the home page or go to a table of contents.

From any page it is also possible to view "remembered" wines (selected by clicking on "Remember this wine"), then to order them. There's a "how to" page explaining how to use the site to best advantage—a rare, welcome feature on the Web.

The one hitch may be that many states don't permit the importation of wine. Virtual Vineyards does include the following language on its order form: "All wines are sold in California. We make no representation as to the rights of anyone to import wine into their state."

Napa for the Weekend

The Napa Valley Virtual Visit lacks the focus of the Virtual Vineyard but has a greater breadth of information. It is essentially an advertising site using materials provided by the clients of Free Run Technologies Inc., a Web consultant. Unfortunately, there is almost no background information about either the site or its creator at <http://www.freerun.com/>, the NVVV home page.

From the home page the visitor will find lots of useful information: driving instructions; a directory of restaurants, hotels, and the like; a calendar of local events; suggestions for planning special occasions; and a place to leave comments about wines and wineries (something Virtual Vineyard lacks). One thing the NVVV lacks is depth of information about individual wineries and the level of expert judgment evident at the Virtual Vineyard, and there's currently no opportunity to order individual wines. But anyone planning a trip to the area will probably save time and money by stopping here first. ♦

Palo Alto . . .

(continued from page 1)

Internet presence. The official reason (on the Web page) for Digital's contribution to Palo Alto's site was that the company hoped to gain knowledge of municipal functions in order to offer more services in that area.

The impetus may have come from Digital, but Palo Alto itself—community, city government, and business—are sustaining the creation of a virtual Palo Alto.

Much of that local impetus has issued from the citizens' group, Palo Alto Community Network (PACOMNET), which has its own Web page. This group of Palo Alto residents has an interest in using Internet-based online communications to put schools and non-profits on the Net and to open a broad virtual channel to the city, making it easier to pay bills, communicate with officials, and read the city council's agendas and minutes.

City Weighs Net-Based Re-engineering

The city itself stands to gain the most from the use of the Internet as a tool for communicating with its citizens and delivering services, said Neff, who is planning to migrate a series of city functions to the Internet.

Since the fall of 1994, the entire city government staff has been equipped with e-mail, facilitating communication internally and with constituents. Some staffers now have full connections as well, and the city's expenses in tracking bills have been cut by several thousand dollars through the use of FTP and other tools to track and download legislation from other cities and states.

Citizens of Palo Alto can now go to the Internet for schedules of the arts and culture classes offered by the recreation department. Public access is available at city hall (through a T1 connection subsidized by Digital) and since January at three public libraries (through dialup connections made possible by a federal grant). The libraries and recreation department will also be offering Internet training for the community.

The promise of the Net for the city goes beyond passively disseminating information online. Palo Alto's leaders also want to streamline the delivery of routine services such as permitting and are starting to explore online procurement as well.

Jack Phillips, assistant building official, estimates that 60 percent of the phone calls to the City of Palo Alto's inspection services division come from contractors who check constantly for updates on the status of their permit applications. The cost of enabling permitting over the Internet is expected to be easily justified

through a reduction in clerical expense and improved department efficiencies.

Even more ambitious is the procurement system the city is studying. The system was developed by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL, located on the other side of the San Francisco Bay from Palo Alto) for the Department of Defense, but LLNL is adapting it for use by business and local government.

John Rhodes, project leader for electronic commerce and electronic data interchange (EDI) at LLNL, says that the procurement system his group created for the federal government has resulted in a three-quarters reduction in administrative costs and a 10 percent to 15 percent reduction in the cost of procuring routine items.

LLNL's system uses both the Internet and value-added networks (VANs) to make it easier for government and other purchasers to do broader solicitations of vendors and to compare bids and control costs. Concurrent changes in the VANs in the past two years have made it simpler and less expensive for smaller vendors to bid on procurement opportunities. The technology is now in place to allow small municipalities to achieve sharp reductions in procurement costs.

Currently LLNL is prototyping such procurement systems for the Long Beach Veterans Administration Hospital and for the Wright Air Force Base, both in California. Palo Alto is still watching and waiting until such systems prove their promise and offer satisfactory levels of security. But when they're ready, Neff said, Palo Alto will be "close to the bleeding edge."

Local Businesses on the Web

The third local group driving Palo Alto onto the Internet—after the community and the city—is business, represented by the chamber of commerce. Of the area's 3,000 to 4,000 businesses, about 800 are members of the chamber. Sixty five percent of chamber members are small companies, with fewer than 20 employees; 20 percent have 20 to 100 employees; and 15 percent are big companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Digital, and Xerox, said Frank, the chamber's director.

The chamber itself has had a Web presence since Digital created one in 1994, but the information is out of date and some members are eager to create more attractive sites than Digital's content-thin and graphically dull listings.

To attract new members and offer a service to existing members, the chamber contracted with Persimmon IT Inc., an information technology consulting firm with offices in Research Triangle, N.C., and Palo Alto, to create Web sites for chamber members. A former partner of Digital's, Persimmon will soon be taking

over the maintenance of Digital's servers and expanding the Web presence of local businesses. Persimmon is currently best known for its Wild Dunes site (see the March newsletter, p. 7).

Because of the scale of the contract, Persimmon could offer good rates—30 percent to 50 percent less than is commonly charged to create a single site for one company. However, Persimmon does not have an exclusive contract. Local Web consultants, such as Internet Media Services (IMS) and the Wombat Internet Guild, will also be creating pages for chamber members.

Frank says Persimmon has "free rein" in creating content for the individual pages; the chamber has no guidelines for either what goes on a page or what constitutes a successful page. The organization is simply making Persimmon's technical and design services available to members.

From Page to Application

The site Persimmon is creating for the chamber has two parts, a forms-based lookup module providing access to information about the 800-plus members, arranged by type of business, and the linked advertising Web pages. Through the Persimmon lookup module, users will be able to select a category such as real estate, and see a list of local businesses in that category. Members who have chosen to create an online ad will have their name highlighted and a link provided to their home page, regardless of whether Persimmon creates the page. In addition, Persimmon offers all members a simple fixed-fee presence based on a template. Those who want more complex sites can contract to do so.

Among the first chamber members to express an interest are small companies with local markets, concentrated in retail or the professions—a grocery, a realtor, a sign maker, a graphic designer, an attorney, and several restaurants, for example.

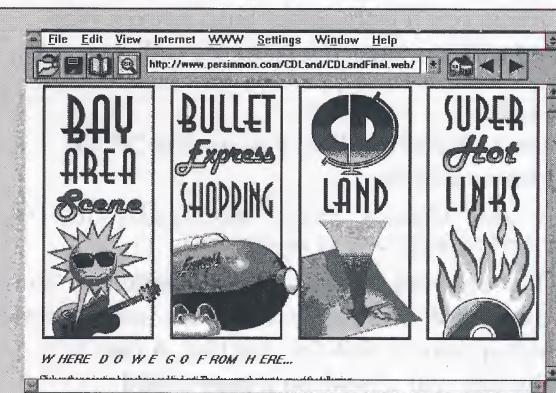
Karl Schlatzer, a Persimmon vice president, sees Persimmon's task in broad terms. He wants to create "information aggregates" that consolidate related information under a single top-level or "umbrella" application (a term Schlatzer prefers to "page"). He rejects the stale business home pages that hawk products and services but don't invite, inform, or induce browsers to add the pages to their bookmarks or hotlists. "Alone, these individual home pages get lost in the sea of Internet resources. By combining sponsors with similar or even competitive interests, the site as a whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts," Schlatzer said.

Such an "aggregate"—like the Persimmon Woods project into which Wild Dunes will soon be immersed—

consists of discrete online interactive applications combined to form a larger site, in this case for golf enthusiasts. Consolidating information resources draws much greater attention to a site's sponsors than they could achieve using isolated pages. Persimmon's research indicates that with content-rich information resources the Persimmon Woods site should attract more than 500,000 users a month by the end of 1995. The site provides more information to a prospective client than could be communicated by print and at less expense than an infomercial or video-based presentation, Schlatzer said,

Persimmon believes that the Palo Alto retailer CDLand (see box, below) could benefit from the exposure and traffic that a top-level application generates. CDLand is the first of the new Web sites Persimmon is creating for the Palo Alto business community.

Internet "malls" are popping up everywhere, but few have made money. Palo Alto's experience may show how an integrated local effort can add the value needed to create the intense local participation and the rich content that will generate both traffic and success. ♦



CDLand

CDLand is a project Persimmon is completing for a Palo Alto retailer of music CDs (<http://www.persimmon.com/CDL>). This new site features a searchable 137,000-item database of music CDs, with an "extremely hot list" of links to music-related Web sites, including the "ultimate bands list" (2,726 links to 970 bands). Also featured is the Bay Area Scene, providing links to sites of interest in and around the area.

The site will post information supplied by users, and it also plans to post sound bytes of local bands in a future release. Owner Bill Glueck plans to add a dedicated database of imported CDs and a used-CD listing sometime this summer. Using Netscape's Netsite server, CDLand plans to offer secure credit-card transactions by mid-April.

HTML (Part II): Making Links

By Kevin Savetz*

Last month we started exploring the mysteries of the Hypertext Markup Language (HTML), the tool you can use to create your own World Wide Web pages. This month we'll take a look at creating *links* with HTML. From the user's perspective, a link is the "hot text"—the text that is underlined, colored, or both, depending on context. When clicked, the link presents new information. Links are the essence of hypertext,

**This is the second of three articles on HTML. The final article will address issues of style and effective presentation. The author, Kevin Savetz, is taking time off from his Help Desk column to write the series. You can visit his personal home page at <http://www.northcoast.com/~savetz/savetz.html>.*

and they are part of what makes the Web so easy to use. In this article you'll learn about links *between* Web pages and *within* a page; the latter are called *anchors*.

How To Link

To create a hypertext link, you use the "a" (or anchor) tag as follows:

Would you like< a href="moreinfo.html">
more information?<p>

This line presents the user with the sentence "Would you like more information?"; the words "more information?" will appear as clickable hot text. A user who selects the link will download a page called moreinfo.html, located in the same directory as the current page (no path is included as part of the file name). In the first part of the tag, the <a> tells the Web client that this is a link. Everything between that tag and the closing tag, , will appear as a clickable link. The <p> tag, you'll remember, forces a line break.

Style mavens consider it poor practice to create links that say "click here," preferring implicit, content-based links such as the one above.

You can use pictures instead of text as links. For instance, it is a common practice to include a small "thumbnail" image with a link to a larger version of the same image. That way, users with slow Internet connections don't have to wait for huge images to transfer unless they explicitly request them. Here's how to do it:

If you're in Peoria, please visit our store.

For the user this line of HTML code will display the text ("If you're in Peoria...") followed by a small picture. If a user clicks on the small picture, a larger version of the picture is downloaded. Although we've used a GIF image in this example, many Web browsers also let you point to other types of images—such as JPEGs and Windows bitmapped (BMP) files. Linking to these file types is fine, but I don't suggest using JPEGs or BMP files for inline images (covered last month), because many browsers don't handle them as gracefully as the tried-and-true GIF format.

Animation and Sound

You can use the same syntax to add links to animation and sound files. For example,

A happy dog

links to a QuickTime movie. The only difference is the file extension of the linked file: MPG for MPEG-format movies, .AU and .AIFF for sounds, and .PS for Postscript files. Make sure your intended audience has the necessary viewer or player. Most UNIX workstations cannot view QuickTime movies, although well-configured Macintosh and Windows computers can. Not everyone has a sound card and speakers today. It's a good idea to provide text equivalents of complex multimedia files out of consideration of the millions of people with less-than-Pentium-class computers. And it's good marketing to reach as many as possible as transparently as possible.

Linking to Files Elsewhere

In these examples, we've used links to point to HTML files and images located in the same directory on the same server as the current page. You can also point to files in other directories of the server using relative pathnames similar to those used in MS-DOS and UNIX. To link to a file in a directory *down one level* from the directory on which the current page is located, you precede the file name by the directory name, as follows:

Where the puppy.gif image is in the pictures directory. Or, you can point to a file that's up a directory using two periods (..), which means "go up one directory":

The beauty of links is that you can point to just about anything on the Internet: *an image* (href="http://www.northcoast.com/images/building.gif"), *a file at an anonymous FTP site* (href="ftp://ftp.northcoast.com/pub/myfile.zip"), or even *an e-mail address*: (href="mailto:savetz@northcoast.com"). Notice that each of the URLs (uniform resource locators) is in quotes.

That last command, "mailto," is an easy way to let users send you electronic mail, if their browsers sup-

```

<title>Arlo's Catalog of Rare Pets</title>
<a NAME="top"></a>
<ul>
<li><a href="reptiles.html">Rare reptiles</a>
<li><a href="birds.html">Exotic avians</a>
<li><a href="others.html">Other Unusual
Creatures</a>
<li><a href="llama.html">Buy one hedgehog get
one
half-price</a>
</ul>
The store mascot is <a href="wilma.gif">Wilma</a>, a long-haired
llama.
Look out, she likes to <a href="bleat.au">bleat</a> at
strangers.<p>
E-mail us at <a href="mailto:arlo@pet.com">arlo@pet.com</a> and
we'll mail
you our full-color catalog.<p>
<a href="#top">Return to top of page</a><p>
<address>Arlo Kats, arlo@pet.com</address>

```

HTML source code for figure shown opposite

port that function, thus adding an interactive dimension to an otherwise passive information display. Note that `mailto` and the URL are separated only by a colon. Your page might include a line like:

Send us e-mail to request your free catalog!

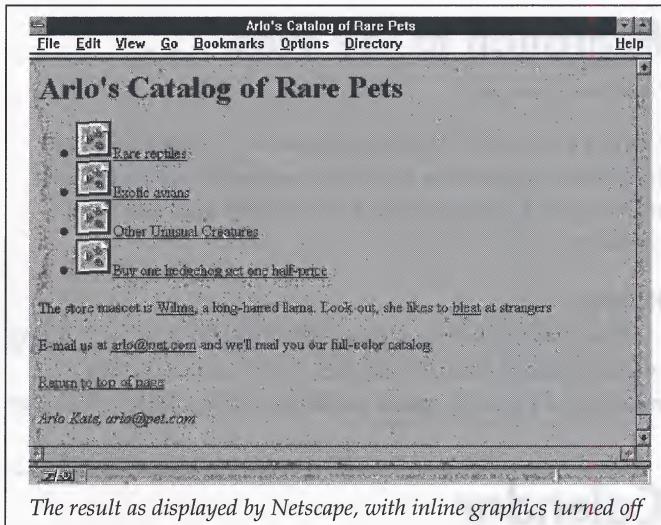
Moving Around a Page

If you're presenting a large amount of information, you should impose a clear organization, use headers, and probably split the information into several, small HTML-linked pages. Sometimes, however, your information can be presented more clearly by keeping it all on one long page (if the information itself is self-contained, as in a long list of links, say). For those times, it is convenient to be able to jump around within a page. You can make this possible by marking a spot in your HTML page, then including an *anchor* to that mark.

You create an anchor using the `NAME` label within the `<a>` tag. For example:

Anywhere else in that HTML file, you can include the anchor `Find out about our selection of pet food`. When clicked, the reader jumps straight to the named anchor, *petfood*. You can also jump to a spot within a remote document:

<a href="http://peoria_store/
for_sale.html#petfood">Find out about
our selection of pet food



The result as displayed by Netscape, with inline graphics turned off

In the next and last article in this series, we'll present style suggestions to help you adapt the content you want to publish on the Web to the constraints and possibilities of HTML. ♦

Migration to the Web . . .

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which they can be downloaded by anyone in the world whose provider carries the group.

Now Net-happenings is available via a searchable World Wide Web page (<http://www.mid.net/NET/>) maintained by MIDnet (Lincoln, Neb.), a subsidiary of Global Internet (Palo Alto, Calif.) and one of the original regional access providers under the National Science Foundation (NSF).

By generating traffic at the mid.net domain, MIDnet is quietly publicizing its own services, of course. Among MIDnet's enhancements to this resource are archives, forms for submitting comments and new resources, and links to other Net-happenings gateways.

Another mailing list now available on the Web is INET-marketing, a high-volume mailing list begun in July 1994. This list, moderated by Glenn Fleischman, is devoted to all aspects of marketing over the Internet. Using a program called hypermail, the list is now also available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.einet.net/hypermail/INET-marketing/>. The current and past months' postings can be displayed by subject, thread, author, and date. The sponsor in this case is the Enterprise Integration Network (EIN), which is owned by MCC (Microelectronics and Computer Technology

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Migration to the Web . . .

(continued from page 7)

Corporation), a Texas-based research consortium of high-tech companies best known for its subject guide to Internet resources and its WinWeb and MacWeb browsers.

Hytelnet

Also making the transition to the Web is Hytelnet, a listing of Telnet-based library resources, Free-Nets, and other resources. Originally made available only by Telnet, Hytelnet

now has a Web interface offering all the features and access capabilities of the Telnet site, with the speed and point-and-click convenience of the Web (<http://www.usask.ca/cgi-bin/hytelnet/>). For Web browsers that support Telnet, this site provides access to most of the world's Telnet resources.

Finally, the Web is beginning to generate the search tools that are further simplifying access to non-Web information. A sampling of search engines—from Veronica to Archie—is available at the Centre d'Universitaire Informatique (CUI) of the University of Geneva: <http://cuiwww.unige.ch/meta-index.html>. ♦

Calendar

WebWorld '95. April 19 - 21. Santa Clara Convention Center, Santa Clara, Calif. Organized by Digital Consulting Inc. Information: SEMINAR@dci-inc.com, <http://199.232.60.132/DCI/>, or call 508-470-3880.

The 21st Century Marketplace: Doing Business on the Internet. Ann Arbor, Mich. April 20. Information: call CICNet at 800-947-4754 or send e-mail to training@cic.net. Seminar presented by Peter Deutsch.

Law of Electronic Commerce: Online Seminar. Starting May 9. Information: call 800-466-4595 or 717-258-1816, or send e-mail to bwrigth01@reach.com. Seminar is conducted by attorney Benjamin Wright, sponsored by First Virtual, organized by the National Computer Security Association, and covers EDI, electronic signatures, e-mail privacy, and legality of electronic contracts.

INET 95—The Internet: Toward Global Information Infrastructure. Internet Society's 5th annual convention. June 26-30. Honolulu, Hawaii. Information: send e-mail to inet95@isoc.org.

First Annual Conference on Telecommunications and Information Markets (COTIM-1995). Nov. 5-8. Newport, R.I. Information: send e-mail to Dr. Ruby Roy Dholokia at ruby@uriacc.uri.edu or David Fortin at dfor8320@uriacc.uri.edu, or call the Research Institute for Telecommunications and Information Marketing, University of Rhode Island, at 401-792-5065.

Internet Expo. Nov. 28-30. Boston, Mass. Sponsored by DCI. Information: call 508-470-3880, fax 508-470-0526, send e-mail to dciconfl@aol.com, or go to <http://www.oec.com/DCI/>. ♦

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